

Are these monsters just a comment on the relationship between the creator and his tools — the writer with words, the artist with paint? Do they also represent the worries and concerns of daily life? The years of civilized living that must be stripped away before the view can be appreciated for what it is? The lifetime of experience that we can't leave behind us to "just paint what's out there," because the monsters insist on getting in the way of the view? And maybe the final word is that we shouldn't try — that painting at the end looks awfully empty with the monsters painted out. Finally, it is for us, the readers, to interpret them as we wish, and we have the author's and the illustrator's invitation to do just that.

And there you are! You've taken your own voyage through Wonderland, and you didn't even have to tumble down a rabbit hole to get there.

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Realism, Magic, and Magical Realism (for Those upon Whom Such Distinctions Are Lost)

Lollypop's Potty. ISBN 2-921198-44-4. *Lollypop's Baby Sister.* ISBN 2-921198-45-2. Joceline Sanschagrin. Trans. Judith Brown. Illus. Hélène Desputeaux. Éditions Chouette, 1993. 20 pp. \$7.95 board. *Once I Was Very Small.* Elizabeth Ferber. Annick, 1993. 24 pp. \$14.95 cloth \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-5037-318-8, 1-55037-321-8. *Aa-Choo!* Wendy Orr. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick, 1992. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-209-2, 1-55037-208-4. *Lullabyhullabaloo.* Mick Inkpen. Stoddart, 1993. 22 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2753-1. *Just You and Me.* Eugenie and Kim Fernandes. Annick, 1993. 28 pp. \$14.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-324-2, 1-55037-327-7. *Good Morning.* ISBN 0-000224003-5. *Good Night.* ISBN 0-00-2240003-3. Jan Colbert. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. HarperCollins, 1994. 14 pp. \$5.95. *The Good Night Story.* Andreas Greve. Illus. Kitty Macaulay. Annick, 1993. \$4.95. ISBN 1-55037-288-2.

Although one suspects most children would endorse the postmodernist insight that the distinctions we make between realism and fantasy are purely arbitrary, it is surprisingly easy to divide a recent group of picture books into these two discrete genres. There are, on the one hand, a number of examples of domestic realism. With protagonists who "stand in" for the reader, and who live through familiar vicissitudes and challenges, these books are primarily designed to teach, to reassure, and to encourage. A second group, on the other hand, entirely subordinates the ups and downs of ordinary life to a sphere in which delightful impossibilities are the order of the day. For the most part, books in this second group are less concerned to promote the

reader's identification with a given character, and are more invested in the narrative virtues of suspense, symmetry, and surprise. With only one exception, none of these books crosses party lines. It is a shame, because only in childhood is the boundary between reality and magic fluid enough to make ordinary life seem as improbable and diverting as fiction.

The purest and best examples in the realistic mode are to be found in the Lollypop series, created by H el ene Desputeaux. Lollypop is a small boy with a very round head to whom unforeseen difficulties present themselves. It is decided on his behalf, for example, that the time has come for him to learn to use the potty. Still less predictably, a baby sister enters his life, usurping his rightful function as fulcrum of the domestic world. With his thoughtful but puzzled expression, his endearing attempts to cope, and his stout-hearted determination to maintain his identity in the face of random circumstance, Lollypop is the existential two-year-old. The pen-and-ink illustrations of Desputeaux and the simple straightforward text of *Sanschagr in* (English translation by Judith Brown) capture the intensity and surprise with which the toddler responds to the world — and convey something of the human condition as well.

Like the very popular Lollypop series for still younger children, these are practical and comforting books. By watching Lollypop succeed, despite his occasional slips and frustrations, children will learn both confidence and sympathy. The realism of these stories is, in fact, the best thing about them: when Lollypop flings his doll against the cupboard (in lieu of baby sister), or uses his potty as a crash helmet, he acts as a role model that is credible because it is familiar, and that is useful because it is within reach.

In a similar realistic vein, though without quite the impact of the Lollypop books, is *Once I Was Very Small*, written and illustrated by Elizabeth Ferber. This, Ferber's first book, is the forthright autobiography of three-year-old Vanessa, who guides the reader confidently through the milestones and achievements that have brought her to her current admirable state of self-sufficiency. Very much *Her Own Person*, and blessed with parents who are content to shun the limelight, Vanessa will impress young children with the delights of autonomy. Ferber's cartoon-style drawings are witty and uncluttered; her text is pure deadpan. And although Vanessa is not the child one might choose to dandle on one's knee in a fit of sentimentality, she serves as a reminder that cuddliness is not the whole end of a toddler's being.

A third portrait from the domestic life of young children is vividly sketched in *Aa-Choo!* by Wendy Orr and Ruth Ohi. When Megan wakes up with a sore throat and runny nose and cannot go to daycare, the inevitable gap between parental work and paid work is exposed, and then inventively bridged. Megan's mother has an important meeting and cannot stay home; Megan's father has an important delivery to make and cannot stay home — but Megan can and does go to work with her mother. Her visit to the office is convincingly rendered from the child's point of view: Ruth Ohi's drawings of elongated grown-ups bustling about with sheaves of paper, and her close-

ups of the legs and feet of the participants in a business meeting (as seen from below the boardroom table) suggest both the mystery and the futility of most adult activity. Megan remains delightfully unmoved by it all; her best moment arrives the following morning when her mother is immobilized by the same cold that set the plot in motion, and she and Megan get to spend the day at home.

On the whole, I prefer the realism of this group of books to the whimsy and fantasy of *Lullabyhullabaloo*, *Just You and Me*, *Good Morning*, and *Good Night*, each of which attempts to do justice to the quirky imaginings of young children. But the breathless illogicality of the childish thought process is almost impossible to pin down in words and pictures. When it is done well (as, for example, by Maurice Sendak or Lewis Carroll), one suspects it is done at a level far below deliberate design — unselfconsciously, and without calculation.

Though engaging and amusing, the fantasy of Mick Inkpen's *Lullabyhullabaloo* is not quite of that calibre. Inkpen makes comical use of many of the ingredients of the fairy tale. A tiny blonde princess is beset by a dragon hissing and snorting outside her window. No sooner is the culprit silenced, than two rambunctious knights in full armour begin a noisy game of leapfrog. And so on — through ghosts who wail, giants who dance the hornpipe, and goblins and trolls who snarf down quantities of burgers and shakes. In addition to the illustrations, which are gently hilarious, the great virtue of this book is that it invites participation. The foldout pages — with their appropriate but still surprising solutions to each new difficulty—are bound to involve children in the story. And the repetition of increasingly emphatic commands (“Yes, you!” “YES, YOU!” YES, DO!”) creates just enough tension to make the story's outcome both a pleasure and a relief.

The zaniness of *Just You and Me* by the mother-and-daughter team of Eugenie and Kim Fernandes is more pronounced than that of *Lullabyhullabaloo*, but still errs on the side of restraint. The book's premise is that a tiny baby will not go to sleep, thus preventing Heather's planned excursion with her mother. The river, the wind, the moon, and the birds are invoked to put the baby to sleep. Each in turn offers a colourful solution to the problem; each must confess itself defeated by the relentlessly crying baby. But the sheer predictability of the sequence works against the fantasy. Although it is charming to see the protagonists blown high above the clouds by the well-intentioned wind, or tacking across the face of the deep with a diaper as a sail, we are already anticipating the next logical stage in their adventure. There is one surprise: a disreputable looking cat “selling garbage by the side of the road” presents the baby with a brace of “yummy fish heads” — yet the effect of this incident is so out of kilter with what has gone before that one is less delighted than simply bemused.

That being said, it must be pointed out that the artwork in *Just You and Me* is very fine indeed. Eugenie Fernandes uses a series of flat watercolour sketches for the preliminary and closing scenes of the story; these are

then contrasted with the more colourful and detailed applique montages that depict the excursion into fantasy. The technique suggests a real commitment to the truth that imagination enhances everyday experience. One wishes only that imagination in this case had been allowed a slightly larger compass.

Good Morning and *Good Night*, written by Jan Colbert, exhibit similar virtues, and suffer from similar defects. Both books depict a daily routine which takes off into the realm of the fantastic. A child, on waking, is transformed into a bird, a seal, a turtle, a frog, and a dragonfly; a child at the end of the day becomes a pig, a duck, a dog, a calf, and a cat. Once again, Fernandes's drawings are vivid, colourful, and rich in detail. Once again, the sequence is so logical and formulaic as to curtail the flight of the imagination.

The intrusions of fantasy and magic into ordinary experience are much more successfully rendered in Andreas Greve's *The Good Night Story*, the one book in this collection that dares to merge the standard genres. This is a sophisticated book, and somewhat beyond the grasp of fans of Lollypop or the sleepless princess. As well as overtly combining the domestic with the surreal, Greve executes some interesting variations on the classic frame narrative. A story told within the story takes on a life of its own — to the point of drawing the protagonist of the main story into its action, and requiring some diplomatic manoeuvres on his part to shut the whole thing down before it gets out of control. That elusive synthesis of consistency and reckless abandon that seems to be missing in the work of Fernandes and Colbert is deftly accomplished here. The blurring of bedtime story with dream, and of narration with participation, is admirable — as is the characterization of some rather artful animals who are first stalked by, and then insist on stalking a hunter. Aided by the watercolour illustrations of Kitty Macaulay, Greve has accomplished the difficult task of balancing fantasy and realism in such a way that each complements the other.

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Little Liars and Big Adventures

Mud Puddle. (New edition). Robert Munsch. Illus. Sami Suomalainen. Annick, 1996. 32 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-468-0. *Mom, the School Flooded!* Ken Rivard. Illus. Jacques Laplante. Annick, 1996. 32 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-474-5. *On the Go*. Roger Paré. Illus. author. Trans. David Homel. Annick, 1996. 24 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-408-7.

Mud Puddle is a revised edition of a story first published in 1979. Munsch has lengthened the text and while Suomalainen's artwork has definitely improved from the clumsy and unattractive pictures of the first edition, some